

Topic: Education_ Theories, Methods and Practices

Phenomenology for architectural design exercises.

The case study of 'Integrated Seminar on Housing'

Relying upon the arguments of recognised architects regarding the importance of the phenomenological approach in the design practice, the authors will report the phenomenology's potential when incorporated into the body of architectural teaching, namely by exposing and discussing an architectural exercise for architecture students from the University of XXX in Belgium. The paper mirrors a five-steps method (phenomenological pentagon) applied in the "Integrated Seminar on Housing" taught in the first year of the programme studies. The method has been applied and explored during the past 3 academic years. The main objective of the course 'Integrated Seminar on Housing' is to teach first year students, generally with no previous knowledge about architecture to critically regard in an 'architectural way' at dwellings and the built environment. Students have to discuss during visual presentations scheduled in gradual demanding levels with a well-based criticism the architectural drawing conventions, the architectural constraints such as site implantation and program as well as the spatial organization of the dwelling and their subjective experience while visiting the house. To achieve the objectives a primary methodological approach is further combined with the phenomenological pentagon. By primary methodological approach is considered the collection of building plans and all other existing material on the dwelling available from the architect, the internet or the library and the 'architectural drawing conventions' including the reproduction of precise building plans of the dwelling – implantation, floor levels and sections – with CAD software. To support, develop and enrich an architectural critique of their case study dwelling, students are introduced to the phenomenological pentagon approach structured in phases: phase 1- awakening phase; phase 2 - self questioning on dwelling; phase 3 - defining parameters; phase 4 - interpreting themes; phase 5 - discussing results. In phase 1 some writings and practical examples from architects and theorists are discussed in class (Zumthor, Pallasmaa, Aalto, Kahn, Lloyd Wright, etc). Most of the students will hear the term 'phenomenology' for the first time during this assignment and the purpose of the exercise is not to teach phenomenology as a philosophical movement or discuss controversies of architectural phenomenology in the history of architecture. The exercise is intended to introduce the students to concepts like atmospheric quality and the impact of this quality in the individuals that experience the architectonic space. In phase 2 students are asked to critically face the theme 'dwelling' by their own, namely referring their experience about dwelling, imagining and describing the house where they would like to live, their memories, feelings, perceptions, imagery about homes they inhabited, such as their family home, friends' home or grandparents' home, bringing up to light the features and the character of such dwellings. In phase 3 a list of parameters is presented to students as light, shadow, color, material, texture, rhythm, structure, proportion, size, volume, shape, inside, outside, in-between, landscape and a list of themes like renovation/new, vernacular/modern, urban/rural, house/apartment, introvert/extrovert etc. It is intended that students are aware that the result of the design process depends on the interplay of rational and objective criteria with intentions and feelings about the space the architect wants to design. Besides functional and technical requirements, students are confronted with the architectural quality of the project they have to interpret, the character of the dwelling, or in other words, its atmosphere. In phase 4 students identify the effects of the chosen parameters and themes on the quality and character of the space they analysed in both a subjective and intersubjective context. In phase 5 students have to present the results of their analysis to their fellow students and jury members. To visualize their analysis, students use graphic material produced with different

representation techniques: CAD plans and sections, 3D modelling and photography. For the phenomenological part of the seminar, the photographs made by the students during the home visits are the main visual expression tool.

In the extended version of this paper will be displayed and discussed few examples of pictures that show how students combined different parameters, organised themes and grasped the atmospheric qualities of the houses they visited. The authors will conclude the paper with some critical reflections about the phenomenological pentagon approach mainly focussing on the didactic and methodological objectives of involving architecture students with both the phenomenological discourse and practice within exercises like the above reported or within their own designing process.

The complete written paper will develop the abovementioned content intertwining references, arguments and visual material.

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